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AUTHOR	Huxur, Gulbahar; Mansfield, Earl; Nnazor, Reginald; Schuetze, Hans; Segawa, Megumi
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the learning needs and adaptation problems of foreign graduate students, and is based on the experiences of the five co-authors' graduate studies in Canada and the United States. It reviews the factors that contributed to their decision to study abroad, pre-sojourn expectations and arrival, their arrival in the host country, cross-cultural adaptation, language teaching and learning, and returning home. Issues such as culture shock, the difficulties of adapting to the host society, the acquisition of "social literacy" in the host culture, the contrast between professor-centered and student-centered learning, and the difficulties encountered when returning home are considered. Extensive quotations are used to illustrate individual perspectives. The paper also recommends that higher education institutions hosting foreign students provide comprehensive and up-to-date information about academic and nonacademic life, familiarize students with course outlines and reading lists before they arrive, provide socialization experiences to help integrate students into the institution and locale, provide academic assistance targeted at foreign students, internationalize the curriculum and learning methods, and provide pre-return assistance to students returning to their home country. (Contains 58 references.) (MDM)

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Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

La société canadienne pour l'étude de l'enseignement supérieur

320 350 rue Albert St
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1R 1B1
Tel: (613) 563-1236
FAX: (613) 563-7739

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Learning Needs and Adaptation Problems of Foreign Graduate Students

Gulbahar Huxur
Earl Mansfield
Reginald Nnazor
Hans Schuetze
Megumi Segawa

Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia

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Abstract

The number of students, including graduate students, who study abroad is on the rise. Although many studies have addressed the political, financial, and organizational dimensions of studying abroad, the learning needs and adaptation problems of individuals have received little attention. In this article, the five co-authors present their views, based on their own experiences as foreign graduate students. Along with the findings of other research studies, they offer recommendations for policy and practice related to graduate study by foreign students.

Sommaire

Le nombre d'étudiants qui poursuivent leur études universitaires à l'étranger continue à monter. Certains aspects – politiques, financiers, institutionels – d'études à l'étranger sont relativement bien connus; d'autres le sont moins. Cet article traite des questions d'apprenticessage et d'adaptation: il présente les perspectives des cinq auteurs qui ont tous eu de l'experience individuelle comme étudiants de maîtrise ou de doctorat dans des institutions canadiennes ou americaines.

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The tradition of the itinerant scholar has a very long history. Even from their earliest beginnings in the Middle Ages, universities have attracted foreign scholars and students to their communities. The cosmopolitan character of the medieval university is amply chronicled in standard histories (Cobban, 1975). Although in contemporary times, universities are, for a variety of reasons, more nationalistic than was the case in the medieval period, the tradition of the wandering scholar remains very much alive. Today, there are more than a million foreign students in higher education worldwide. Foreign student enrollment in Canadian post-secondary institutions, for instance, was approximately 62,000 in 1992/93. Of these, nearly 15,500 were registered in undergraduate programs, and 22,000 students in graduate programs in Canadian universities (Statistics Canada, 1995). Ten years earlier, the overall number was 45,000, of which 9,700 were graduate students. These figures serve to indicate the growing importance of foreign students and foreign study in Canada, particularly at the graduate level.

Despite such numbers (of foreign students) and the suggestion that higher education is again becoming increasingly international, the literature on foreign study and foreign students is relatively sparse. Although a number of recent studies have addressed the political, financial, psychological and organizational dimensions of foreign study (Knight, 1994; Rahman & Kopp, 1992), existing literature tends to be applied rather than theoretical in nature. Furthermore, comparatively little research has been directed toward understanding the individual learning conditions of foreign students and the socio-cultural environment in which foreign study takes place. Altbach (1991) noted that although foreign students have served as a convenient population for examining issues such as attitudinal change, the foreign student experience itself has often been peripheral to the concerns of researchers. This lack of interest has been recognized as a serious omission in research (Dei, 1992), an omission which has precluded attention being directed toward the individual needs and problems of this group (Altbach, 1991).

Perhaps as a consequence of this omission, some previous assumptions about the processes of foreign student adaptation and attitude formation, such as Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve hypothesis, have not held up under scrutiny (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). This hypothesis suggests that students arrive in the host country with strong motivation and positive expectations, subsequently confront many difficulties both academic and nonacademic in nature which render adaptation and learning more challenging than originally thought, yet later achieve positive attitudes again towards the end of the stay as adjustment problems are resolved. Although the hypothesis views adaptation as a process which varies over time, it overlooks the specific factors at each phase that determine adaptation problems and neglects examining the mechanisms to cope with them (Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

The present paper is an attempt to address this research and policy gap by utilizing the experiences of post-secondary students who have studied, or are currently studying abroad. Its purpose is to provide a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of adaptation and learning, and of individual student needs and problems.

The article[1] presents different dimensions of the experience of being a foreign student. These dimensions - organized according to the chronological order in which they are usually encountered - include pre-sojourn expectations and motivations to study abroad; cross-cultural adaptation; socio-cultural,

[1] The article has its origins in a number of informal and unstructured conversations during which the five co-authors - four doctoral students and one faculty member with similar experiences - compared notes about their experiences studying abroad. At the suggestion of fellow students, the upshot of these discussions was communicated as a panel presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Bureau of International Education in Vancouver. Based on the very lively discussion it provoked and encouragement from the audience, the group decided to pursue a research review to see how their personal experiences compared with those of other studies or more theoretical works on foreign student learning needs and cultural and social adjustment. We were also encouraged to think of ways in which Canadian institutions could better assist foreign graduate students with their adaptation and learning. We subsequently presented an expanded version of the panel paper at the annual CSSHE conference at Montreal in 1995.

socio-linguistic, and academic needs; and home country re-entry. The paper concludes with some suggestions for institutional policy or practice which should, in the view of the co-authors, help to alleviate some of the difficulties identified.

The five co-authors[2] upon their personal experiences as foreign students in a variety of host nations as part of their analysis of these issues. The underlying assumption of the paper is that although similarities between the adaptation experiences of international students do exist, dissimilarities concerning the nature and degree of adaption experiences are more prevalent (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). In addition we assume that international students face more problems at the early stages of their stays because of differences in languages, customs, food, and academic and social environments.

The Decision to Study Abroad

Zikopoulos and Barber (1986) have found that among the most critical and least understood aspects of foreign student education are individual students' decisions to study abroad. Although educational institutions in host countries have tended to regard the foreign student's sojourn as solely motivated by academic interest, research has shown that student motivations are related to a number of factors, such as type of studies chosen, nature of programs, and even nationality of students (Teichler & Steube, 1991).

Pre-sojourn expectations have traditionally been viewed as a crucial factor in mediating subsequent cross-cultural adaptations (Rogers & Ward, 1993). Although it is commonly thought that expectations which are not confirmed after arrival in the host country can lead to psychological stress and maladjustment (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), the co-authors' experiences suggest that even when expectations are accurate, adjustment problems often occur. Reflecting on pre-sojourn motivations and expectations from their personal experiences, the authors recall particular decisions to take up studies abroad, and the reasons leading to these decisions.

HS With hindsight, It is difficult to describe exactly my expectations when I went abroad to pursue my studies. Maybe it is fair to say that they were not very precise and that a sense of excitement and of adventure in the unknown prevailed, combined with a sense of both self confidence and readiness to discover a new world, as well as a keen thirst to learn more than a home university could teach me. In a sense, the plan to go abroad was in the tradition of a wandering journeyman who gathers experience during younger years, and learns from working in different settings. This general motivation notwithstanding, my academic project was very clearly planned and I had fairly concrete ideas how studying abroad would expand my professional experience and enhance my career possibilities.

GH My motivation to go abroad was to get a higher degree at an internationally recognised university, to test out the English language I learned in China, and to learn English culture so that I could be a better instructor of English as a Foreign Language upon my return.

RN Because my wife had left Nigeria to study in Canada almost a year prior to my departure for graduate study in the same country, my motivations to study abroad are probably atypical. Certainly I wished to pursue academic studies and

[2] GH, who is from Xinjiang Province in China came to Canada to study language education. After completing both her undergraduate and teaching degrees in China, she received her Masters degree from Queens University and is currently completing her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. EM is a Canadian education student who recently returned to Canada with his family from an educational sojourn in the United States where he had planned to complete his PhD. When the doctoral program was eliminated by his university due to financial constraints, he came back to Canada and completed a PhD at UBC. RN, an Ibo from Nigeria, completed his undergraduate degree in Nigeria, his Master studies in Victoria, Canada, and is currently completing his doctoral dissertation at UBC. HS was born and educated in Germany and studied social sciences and Romance languages as an undergraduate student in France, and later, as a graduate student, law and government at the University of California at Berkeley. He is now a faculty member at UBC's Department of Educational Studies. MS, who is from Japan, completed her Masters degree in Social and Educational Studies at UBC and is now enroled as a doctoral student in multicultural education.

experience a different society, but one of my principal motivations for study abroad was to be reunited with my wife. While my combined motivations for foreign study may not be characteristic of those of most foreign students, there is little in the literature on education sojourns that serves to identify a typical set of motivations.

MS I came to Canada to improve my English language skills, to experience a different culture, and to study multicultural education with a view to introducing multicultural initiatives into the Japanese education system.

EM With the older of my four children nearing completion of high school, I decided to return to university to undertake a PhD in education. I needed a program which would provide summer session courses prior to the period of doctoral residency, because the terms of my leave of absence from my employment required it, and because my wife and I did not wish our two youngest children to be absent from their current school for more than one school year. After extensive investigation we discovered that most Canadian universities required two year doctoral residencies. It was only because programs which suited our time requirements were not available at Canadian universities that we eventually chose a university in the United States.

If we consider these motivations for study abroad, some definite patterns emerge, but there is little to suggest typicality. Academic motivations are clearly important and dominant, however others include family and economic considerations as well as career-related objectives. Often these are combined with a pronounced interest in learning in and about another culture.

Pre-sojourn Expectations and Arrival

Anticipation of what to expect in the host country is important in the decision-making processes of all foreign students. How realistic such expectations are depends on a combination of the kind of information students can access, the reliability of their sources, and their ability to decode this information. In some cases, students will have first hand accounts about the prospective host country, and sometimes even of the institution where they hope to enrol, through travel experience or from friends or family members. However, these expectations are unlikely to match reality once the student has arrived in the host country, and even if there is only a minimal expectation/reality gap, these students will not be entirely protected from encountering various difficulties of adapting to the new environment.

For prospective students, academically focused interests often require more elaborate and precise advance information than is typically available from higher education institutions in host countries. Even when information provided to prospective foreign students is rather detailed, for instance in the form of a university calendar or registration guide, it is often difficult to decode and fully understand for students from different language and institutional backgrounds. In addition, calendars or registration guides do not include some relevant information. This information, often easily available to domestic students through other sources or informal channels, includes class size, completion rates of students, employment records of previous students, availability of tutoring or informal study groups, and actual chances of securing financial support. Information of this kind, although probably not all that crucial for the decision to go abroad, will often have an influence on the choice of host country and institution.

Adaptation is not a problem exclusive to foreign students. Domestic students also face problems when entering a new academic program or setting. But for foreign students these "normal" problems are compounded by new academic challenges, new customs, different living arrangements and styles, new forms and codes of social life and behaviour, unfamiliar food, and a foreign language with which they may not be sufficiently familiar to express themselves fluently at an academic level (Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

This general pattern is largely consistent with the experience of the co-authors. Although some had reliable information and hence, expectations which proved to be essentially correct, the presumptions of others proved to be quite inaccurate, causing disappointment, distress and even a desire to return home.

RN As my wife had left for Canada earlier and had told me what to expect, and because I had read extensively about Canada, my expectations were quite accurate. That didn't keep me from having some clear adjustment problems having mainly to do with cultural differences. While I knew that the new physical and social environments would be different from what I had been used to, I found that my body had difficulty adjusting to the climate, and I experienced social difficulties. I was aware long before I came to Vancouver that, on balance, Canadian lifestyle is more individual than communal, but in reality I found it was difficult to cope with individualism, having been brought up in a communal mode characterized by sharing and almost unregulated interference in the affairs of others. Here in Canada, people tended to be indifferent and aloof. Everybody paddled their own canoe it seemed. I had an acute sense of having sustained enormous social losses.

MS The expectations I had before coming to Canada of the academic difficulties in a North American graduate school proved to be pretty much correct. Because of the different academic tradition in Japan, I foresaw that class participation, essay and reading assignments would pose problems. Although I had been expecting and preparing myself for such difficulties, soon after I started my program I completely lost confidence in my ability to survive graduate school. I was so desperate that I was about to give up everything and go home. Some of these feelings had less to do with the academic difficulties as such, but with a sense of being severed from my familiar cultural base and my friends. To a much greater extent than I had ever imagined, loneliness and social isolation were major aspects of my new life in Canada. So, I guess, preparing myself for difficulties of various kinds had not lessened the blow.

GH My initial experiences when arriving in Canada were in sharp contrast to my expectations. I had known that unlike my own country, China, Canada was a developed and rich country. Therefore, I had very high expectations, assuming that everyone in Canada was rich and enjoyed a high standard of living, had a relatively high level of education and lived in houses or apartments well furnished and equipped. The reality to which I came appeared to be quite different. People would wear T-shirts and jeans most of the time making me feeling quite out of place in my business suit. Instead of finding a well furnished apartment to live in, I found myself in a tiny room with not even a single piece of furniture in it. Fellow students and other people who were aware of this tried to help by donating articles of furniture that they could spare, but depending on the charity of strangers and accepting donations was for me quite unacceptable, even degrading. Unmet expectations and a sense of degradation made it impossible for me to concentrate on my studies. I desperately wanted to return to China.

Culture shock of this sort is a major factor in adaptation, but has been assumed to be less of a problem when people move to a country that is culturally similar to their home country (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). This assumption seems especially valid in the case when the two countries involved belong to the same language family and share strong common cultural roots, as is the case with Canada and the United States. However, this is not necessarily the case as is shown from the experience of the Canadian co-author:

EM I had assumed that American culture and education would be very similar to those of Canada, but the longer we stayed the more aware of differences we became. We had assumed that we would share much in common with our American hosts because of our common ancestry, but when we met host nationals socially, though we were often greeted effusively, we were as quickly forgotten. In actuality we found a greater affinity with other international students from Nepal, China, and South Africa than we did with Americans. Difficulties were often related to practical matters such as finding a place to stay, and generally to finding one's way around. Although at some institutions housing facilities are set aside for foreign students, at other institutions there is no housing reserved for foreign students or there are long waiting lists.

HS In spite of my long-term interest in the country which, I thought, would prepare me for what I might expect and to look for, much of what I found was rather different. My belief that, upon arrival, I would have no difficulty in finding a room in a student residence or from a private landlord turned out to be somewhat blue-eyed as there was a marked lack of student housing, dormitories or private rooms. As there was no

> assistance on the part of the university with accommodation for foreign students, I spent the better part of the first three weeks trying to find an affordable room.

Although problems like finding affordable housing or a part-time job are not specific to foreign students, they are aggravated by unfamiliarity with the host society and limited host language skills. Lack of proficiency with the national idiom makes inquiries by telephone confusing or impossible. Landlords renting out private rooms are often prejudiced against potential tenants with unfamiliar customs. Other routes such as answering rooms-for-rent ads in writing are beset with similar problems. Thus assistance from the university, or some other specialized service, such as an international student centre, or an International House are often of crucial importance in easing the initial problems of getting installed and settled in.

Cross-cultural Adaptation

Despite a general lack of research interest in foreign students' experiences, a number of studies deal with the difficulties, stress, alienation, adaptation and coping experienced by many foreign students. Such difficulties are not static but tend to vary over time. They are also dependent on various factors, such as general issues of culture and tradition of the student's country of origin and the openness and tolerance of the host country, and individual factors such as preparedness, self esteem, independence, emotional stability, endurance and maturity.

In a survey involving 300 international students, Uehara and Hicks (1989) found that, aside from finance, students ranked lack of friendship, loneliness, culture shock, educational communication, lack of understanding, and language acquisition as their greatest concerns. Other studies (Finsterbusch, 1992; Rohrlich & Martin 1991; Schuetze, 1989) confirm that loneliness and homesickness, difficulties of getting to know people in the host country, and being subject to stereotypes and prejudice by fellow students and others appear to be the greatest problems for international students. Some studies report that when newcomers establish lasting social relationships with co-nationals who have arrived earlier or with host nationals, understanding of the host culture increases and helps to alleviate social and cultural stress (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Kaikai, 1989; Kim, 1988).

Like Perrucci and Hu (1995), Gazzaniga (1988) maintains that anxiety and stress are factors encountered by all students entering new educational programs or institutions, and that high levels of stress can be detrimental to health and educational achievement. For the international students entering a completely new and unfamiliar education system, stress levels increase due to the need to adjust to living in a foreign country (Kim, 1988). In a study that purports to measure satisfaction among foreign students, Perrucci and Hu (1995) distinguish four general factors which function to either increase the problems foreign students face, or conversely reduce such difficulties. These factors are: social status (gender and marital status), individual status (language skills, financial situation, grades, self esteem and aspiration), social resources (exposure to the host country's culture, contact with host students, and help from other co-national students), and finally, social context (the attitudes found in the host country towards the students home country, and discrimination). A survey of some 600 foreign graduate students in a Midwestern U.S. university using these factors, found that language skills, self esteem, and a feeling of positive involvement with their social environment were determining factors of satisfaction (Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

The term "acculturation," often applied to the study of adaptation of immigrants, refugees and first nations people, has also been used by some writers to describe the process foreign students must undergo to become fully familiar with, and integrated into, the culture of the host country. Acculturation has been explained as the cultural and social adaptation to the new environment (e.g., Berry, 1992; Shade, 1989). The term suggests that successful adaptation requires abandonment of elements of the natal culture before elements of the new culture can be acquired (Herberg, 1989; Kim, 1988).

Early researchers in the field of cultural adaptation focused on psycho-dynamic explanations and tended to consider cross-cultural transition experience as response oriented, stressful and problematic (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; 1986). For example, cross-cultural transitions were often associated with "culture shock"

which is linked to distress, anxiety, physical or mental illness, and removal or distortion of familiar cues in one's environment (*e.g.*, Adler, 1975; E. Hall, 1959; Oberg, 1960). Other scholars (Byrnes, 1966; Guthrie, 1985) adopted the notion of "cultural fatigue" and "role shock" to interpret sojourners' stressful experiences. Furnham and Bochner (1982), however, contend that the concept of psychological adjustment underlying explanations of these negative cross-cultural transition experiences implies that the problems encountered during cross-cultural contact require some form of clinical treatment. They also argue that the concept of psychological adjustment suggests "cultural chauvinism" because it implies that if the sojourner's adaptation to the new society is solely a response to the new environment, then the sojourner's natal culture is, at best, irrelevant, perhaps even hindering the adaptation process. Cultural assimilation would be the inevitable outcome of this psychological adjustment process.

In contrast to the response and cultural loss oriented "psychological adjustment view," Furnham and Bochner (1982) propose a self-determination oriented "cultural learning/social skill model" as a more adequate characterization of the foreign student's intercultural transition experience. This view, which corresponds with the adaptation experiences of the co-authors, sees the major task of the stranger not as responding or psychologically adjusting to the new environment, but as learning new social and cultural skills which have currency in the new society. The immediate post-arrival condition of the sojourner is interpreted as a "social skills deficit" (Furnham, 1988), or as a lack of "social literacy" (Faichney & Beardsley, 1992). The critical skills to be acquired concern the definition, interpretation, and negotiation of new social situations (Disman, 1990).

> MS One year after I began my M.A. program, I started living with my Canadian friend and her daughter. At that time my friend had just finished her MA program in my department and had returned to her teaching job at a secondary school. Living in her house was fun. It was also useful for my study because I got to know many teachers and learned practical aspects of the Canadian education system. My friend's daughter sometimes teased me about my pronunciation and my reactions to culturally different issues, but it turned out to be a real learning experience for me.

> GH Other than the casual clothes and the informal style that I had to get used to, I did not have much difficulty with the Canadian culture. I was very impressed with and liked the nonjudgemental attitude that many Canadian people hold towards other cultures. It was very refreshing to hear Canadian friends say "That's just how things work in that culture. It's sure different than here, but that does not mean it is wrong." This kind of remark and these attitudes made me feel better understood and accepted as a person.

> RN After trying for some time to come to terms with the individualistic lifestyle in Canada, I have, to a considerable extent, adjusted to ways of life here . . . I am fairly familiar with a good deal of the conversational rituals. I have learned to deal with friends and colleagues brought up in the individualistic mode without frequent friction in our relationships.

Rather than response or reaction, the co-authors' acculturation experiences were generally characterized by culture learning which was primarily the result of their own intentionality, self-determination and personal choice. This experience tends to confirm Wachtal's (1972) contention that motivation to adapt is a more important determinant of adaptation (outcomes) than reaction to the environment in which the adaptation takes place. Although at times the co-authors felt that their natal cultures were threatened or misunderstood by the host society, their growing understanding of and adaptation within the host society were accomplished without requiring the loss of natal cultures. Rather than trading the acquisition of new culture for the loss of natal culture, what Kim (1988) describes as "no acculturation without deculturation" (p. 124), sojourn experiences of the co-authors more accurately reflect an adaptive process of culture learning. Newly acquired culture supplements but does not replace the natal culture, something that Boelhower (1983) has described appropriately as "a doubling, not an erasing process" (p.114).

What does all of this mean for the role of educational institutions? Considerable learning and adaptation is up to the individual student. Given the importance of involvement with the social environment, however, one implication for host institutions is that they should assist international students in coping with the difficult initial stages of

acculturation by facilitating the development of social networks. This position has been advanced by Biggs (1987), who argues, that "it is an appropriate responsibility of the institution and its members to assure that opportunities are made available for a variety of socialization activities and that new students are not left to become solely dependent upon their country colleagues for information and assistance" (p.76).

Language Teaching and Learning

Language proficiency is one of the most significant determinants of levels of social and academic satisfaction among international students. In fact, some researchers indicate that host language acquisition is the most difficult adaptation problem for student sojourners (Chen, 1990; Fradd & Weismantel, 1989). Linguistic difficulties, especially concerning acquisition of languages from the same linguistic family, are sometimes underestimated prior to the student's arrival:

> HS Having had a "classical" education in the humanities, my English was very basic and my main academic reading had been Shakespeare and Chaucer. But I thought that this and my strong foundation in Latin would enable me to quickly acquire modern English once in the country. This assumption was based on the belief, partly correct, but largely over optimistic, that language could be easily learned, in fact assimilated with no effort, if the students are familiar with the substance of their studies and when they live in an environment where the language is actually spoken. My relatively poor language skills were the cause of no small alienation. I no longer had the cultural and linguistic home base with which I could comfortably move. Having to express myself in English, I felt like a small child, or worse, a grown up with a severe speech defect who was reduced to very basic communication. I realized that many of the special features of my personality, like my sense of humour, or my linguistic subtlety, were very much linked to my own cultural and linguistic background, and were not familiar to most of the people I came in contact with. Even those Americans who had some knowledge or appreciation of my own language or culture, knew only small parts of it. There was thus a constant need to "translate" my own cultural base to that of my interlocutors, not only in linguistic but also in substantive terms.

The need for language proficiency extends beyond the challenge of being fluent in day-to-day matters and is critical for establishing social contacts and engaging in social and cultural activities. Socio-cultural knowledge concerns background or contextual understanding of social behaviors and cultural protocols that are specific to the host society. If all knowledge, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) maintain, is socially constructed and culturally situated, then socio-cultural knowledge becomes essential to the international student's acquisition of forms of knowledge. This is important to take into account on two levels; the socio-cultural and the academic level.

Socio-cultural knowledge of the host society is important for avoiding misunderstandings between international students and faculty, fellow students, or others in the host country over socially defined activities such as politeness protocols.

> GH After I came to Canada I learned that expressions such as "We should get together sometime," or "Give me a call," did not literally mean - as they do in some cultures - that those conversing would make a sincere effort to get together. I was surprised to learn that in the Canadian context these expressions were most often used to say "good bye." It has not been unusual for international students (including myself) to call someone who had said "Give me a call" and be answered with a confused "Do I know you?"

It has been pointed out by many authors, from Nietzsche (1968) to, more recently, Chambers (1994), that language and words are not signifiers so much as they are interpretations imposed by those who have the power to privilege their interpretations. Socio-linguistic knowledge includes the ability to understand the use of certain words, phrases, communication patterns, and non-verbal gestures as they are given contextual meaning within the host society.

International students' lack of familiarity with the new socio-cultural environment in which knowledge and communication patterns are constructed and defined puts them at a particular disadvantage with respect to understanding, applying, and interpreting

knowledge in the host academic setting (Uehara & Hicks, 1989; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). Initial reliance on cultural patterns of learning (*e.g.*, oral, tradition-oriented, group based learning) or culture specific social skills relevant to learning (*e.g.*, individual apprenticeship or scholarship vs. collective or group based learning), which differ from those preferred in the host society, may also contribute to learning difficulties for international students (Schuetze, 1989).

> HS When I first arrived in the US, I found that teaching and learning differed substantially from what I was familiar with back home. Learning was based on assigned readings and very vivid class discussions, mostly with fellow students, the professor usually taking the role of arbiter. Back home, however, there were pontifical lectures with little or no discussion, and seminars which were more interactive but were still very much dominated by the professor. Graduate learning thus took place mostly outside class or seminar rooms and was more or less dependent on the student's initiative and drive, this taking the form of independent studies. This change from an independent studies mode of learning in Germany, to an assigned readings or spoon fed - or so it seemed - mode of study in the US was difficult to get used to at first, as was the change from the role of passive absorber of lectures and readings to that of active debater or presenter. And, of course, to be linguistically handicapped at first did not help with being active in class discussions.

Many international students are more familiar with a highly organized, lecture style of instruction, and closely monitored, systematic supervision of their graduate programs. To those familiar with this pattern, the indirect and apparently uncontrolled nature of instruction in many North American graduate seminars is a shock.

> GH In terms of learning, the first year of graduate work was difficult. The biggest difficulty I had was getting used to the Canadian way of writing "academically," because I was used to the Chinese way of writing and especially essay writing. Another thing I had to get used to was a more empirically-oriented and more student-centred approach to teaching and learning where many more examples and a lot of student opinions are preferred. At first, this caused a certain level of frustration because I felt the time was being wasted by listening to some first year fellow student instead of the "expert," *i.e.*, the professor. Once I came to understand the difference in teaching style and format I became quite comfortable with it and enjoyed learning.

In a recent study, Huxur (1994), records the experience of a fellow graduate student from China: "Sometimes, I can't follow the lecture because the professors teach differently here. They don't follow the textbooks. They don't write down the important points on the board. They don't summarize the lecture as the Chinese professors do."

According to observers such as Churchill (1987), host country institutions have seldom met the needs of foreign students, and institutional organization and program delivery have not often acknowledged or reflected the cultural diversity of the institution's international constituents. "We have accepted cultural diversity," states Allmen (1990), "but we have not dealt with its implementation" (p. 218). It is important, then, that instruction and curriculum become attuned to the circumstances and characteristics of international students.

Although many international students arrive with high levels of host language competence, cultural understanding is often necessary before recently acquired linguistic capabilities may be effectively applied within new cultural contexts (Stockfelt-Hoatson, 1982). Part of this culture learning includes understanding classroom or seminar protocols in the new learning environment. Without such understanding, it is difficult for new international students to know when, how, or what to contribute to discussions, thus impeding their active class participation (Kao & Gansneder, 1995).

Another learning difficulty often experienced by international students is the practice by host academics of grounding concepts with practical examples derived solely from the host environment or culture. Some international students feel excluded from seminar discussions because the subject being discussed is so closely connected to host cultural contexts that it is difficult for them to comprehend the concept, even when they are familiar with its underlying principles. They may also find it difficult to know how to contribute to the subject of discussion when what they are able to bring to the discussion seems to be culturally irrelevant. Consequently, the common practice of interactive class discussions in host

academic institutions, which ostensibly permits international students to express their views and pose questions, may actually function to stifle discussion, increase frustration, and limit the benefits derived from discussion.

The language socialization model advanced by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) offers considerable promise for assisting international students in developing socio-linguistic competencies within new environments. This model acknowledges that students come to a new learning environment with different background experiences, expectations of organizational systems, and concepts of learning and teaching. Schieffelin and Ochs regard language learning as a discourse in socio-cultural context and refer to linguistic techniques such as "scaffolding" to achieve the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic competencies necessary for learning within the host society and its academic institutions.

There are several ways that host academic institutions might address the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic needs of international students. Rather than focusing predominantly on advising international students as to what they need, host institutions could make more of an effort to discover, understand and address the needs experienced by such students. Professors and advisors could assist by providing closer monitoring of the circumstances, progress, and programs of international students. Also, professors could ensure that examinations do not unnecessarily incorporate socio-linguistic constructs that would be unfamiliar to international students, or utilize culture-specific subject examples and contexts as checks for comprehension of general concepts. Professors could demonstrate their appreciation for cultural diversity by incorporating a variety of learning styles, cultural examples, and contexts within their lectures and group seminars (Scarcella, 1990).

Returning Home

After studying abroad for a year or even longer, returning to the home country can be as painful, though for different reasons, as the initial experiences after arrival in the host country.

> EM When it was time to leave Oregon, our initial feeling was a strong sense of loss, not so much loss of another country or culture, but of another existence. But it was not our old way of life we went back to in Canada. The deaths, marriages, or migrations of friends and family members back home during the period of our absence had changed our family and social networks, and our places within them. Upon return we received the same effusive welcome that we had initially received in the United States, followed by the same profound disinterest. People had managed somehow without us for the time we were gone, and could probably continue to do so. . . .We had become irrelevant socially. . . . We had assumed when we migrated that it might take us awhile to 'fit into' the new environment, but we had never imagined that we would be required to fit back into our old environment upon return.

As another student sojourner (cited in EarthLinks, 1992) remarked, while he had been "prepared not to 'fit in' right away" in the host country, "it wasn't supposed to be that way when I came home" (p.7). S. Hall (1987) has argued that "Migration is a one way trip. There is no home to go back to" (p.44). Perhaps people who migrate for educational purposes would rather preserve than burn the bridges behind them, but many students find when they attempt to return that the bridges may be crossed in one direction only. This feeling is grounded in the realization that the person returning home is not the same person who departed. That is why home does not appear to be the same either. Becoming acculturated in the new environment, even with difficulties and problems, means gradually changing one's outlook and experience. Sartre (1968) observed, "to understand is to change, to go beyond oneself"(p.18). Learning to see things through the looking glass of a different culture means changing one's perspective and perception of things. Returning sojourners have often acquired a perspective on their home culture that is not usually available to those who have never left it (Schutz, 1970). "New responses are adopted in situations that previously would have evoked old ones" (Kim, 1988, p.53). And, as Jones (1984) has found, the home group, once respected and admired, is sometimes found lacking by the returnees - an

explanation for the fact that returning students often experience difficulties in relating to their families and friends (Brislin & Van Buren, 1986).

> EM When we left Canada we thought that we would return to our old world some day. We did come back, but it was not the same old world. We had expected only to see a different environment in the foreign country - we had not expected to become different ourselves. For as much as we had been acutely aware of our new and changed environment, we had been unaware of our new and changing selves. Our construction of reality changed as we changed and when we returned to Canada we began to construct our old world differently. Things we had once done or enjoyed seemed either meaningless or no longer viable; other activities or objects which had previously held little interest seemed suddenly engaging and possible. Perhaps we had never consciously looked at our world prior to our sojourn, the inherited knowledge and assumptions of our Canadian 'habitus' remaining obscure to our consciousness. But upon return, we began to see it with different, more comparative eyes. When our gaze revealed the home returned to as not the one fondly remembered, we realized we had lost not only our American existence, but our former Canadian existence as well.

Some of the co-authors have not yet returned to their home countries, but of those who have, not all have felt this profound sense of loss and not belonging, even if there was some degree of alienation and frustration.

> HS Coming home felt good, and the world I returned to was quite familiar, yet I knew that I had discovered a new dimension and I knew I would go abroad again. My friends at home welcomed the traveller back into their circles but asked - if they were interested at all in what I had experienced and learned while away, and not all of them were - what I felt were often poorly informed and superficial questions. While I was disappointed at first, I realized that it was not so much their lack of interest and ignorance, but the fact that I had experienced something new and exciting that had changed my outlook, perceptions, and attitudes in a profound way.

This feeling was also experienced by students who are studying abroad and return home for a visit.

> GH I went back twice to China for visits. The first visit was for five months, and the second one was for a month and a half. I found both visits full of excitement and uneasiness. I was excited because I saw relatives and friends plus the rapid change in my country. Materially, many people seemed to have much more. There were taxis and privately owned new houses all over the place. I felt uneasy because it seemed everyone was looking at me differentiy. Many close relatives seemed to be either indifferent towards me or blaming me, who has left for what is seen as the Golden West, for their misfortunes. No one seemed to appreciate or care how much difficulty I went through studying in Canada. Many friends seemed to have gone to different locations. The "home" I left now felt very different.

This personal feeling of loss on the one hand, and of having gained ample new insights, perspectives, experience and career opportunities on the other, is probably quite natural for anyone who lives abroad for a period of time. In the case of graduate students however, there may be additional reasons. First, the sojourn abroad occurs at a time in the student's life when formal education is coming to an end and "real life" in terms of employment, career, and often family life is just about to start. In particular, if the student has successfully adapted to the new environment, the feeling of having severed or loosened one's ties with home, of having been up-rooted from the home soil, is probably much stronger than it would be in the case of a high school student who knows that the sojourn is very limited in time and that there will be a continuation of their formal education back home. Secondly, and related to this, the successful graduate student will probably feel that their career opportunities are better in the host country. For those returning home upon graduation this also means a loss of untried or un-realized chances, and often a return to an uncertain future, especially if the student has not kept in close contact with the home country.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Not all factors that contribute to the learning experiences of foreign students can be controlled or influenced by policy or institutional practice. However, some can. Here we identify these factors and suggest how they might be addressed by host institutions.

Information

First, there is a need for comprehensive, up-to-date and honest information about what the institution has to offer, and what services are in place for foreign students. Although informational material cannot address all possible questions or situations foreign students may face, it is not enough to provide strictly academic information such as admission and enrolment procedures, and information about programs, courses, and prerequisites. There is also a need for "social" information. This includes details about the health and social services available, religious institutions and services - not only Christian ones - cultural institutions and associations, and specific food services. Motivations and expectations of foreign students can be quite different, hence informational material aimed at this group should take this variety into account. As foreign students are quite heterogeneous, different types and versions of materials informing potential foreign students are required to prepare them for their arrival in the host country.

This information should be provided in a way that is comprehensible to foreigners not familiar with the Canadian system of higher education. One way of providing such information is to engage former graduates who have returned home to talk to prospective new students. Although alumni may not be familiar with the latest developments at their former alma mater, they can certainly convey a sense of the academic climate and of extra-curricula life at the host institution. Moreover, they draw a more realistic picture - even if coloured by personal memories - of living abroad as a student and of the adjustment required regarding personal lifestyle.

Language preparation

That a foreign student should have a working command of the language of the host country is obvious in principle. However, the difficulties involved in achieving such familiarity are often not apparent even to well informed students prior to their departure for the host country. Mastering the everyday language is not sufficient, and a certain degree of familiarity with the "symbolic" language and with the social and cultural contexts of key academic terminology is a prerequisite for foreign graduate students, especially in the humanities and the social sciences. This is not normally learned in language preparatory classes, nor is it tested comprehensively in TOEFL type exams. As graduate students, their teachers, and supervisors can tell, and as the co-authors of the paper have personally experienced, possessing this additional level of language is a necessity for successful graduate level studies. To a certain extent linguistic proficiency can be acquired "on the job," but it would be beneficial if prospective students were to receive some guidance and advice ahead of time, for example in the form of course outlines and reading lists in their intended field of studies. This would permit students to familiarize themselves with some of the principal concepts and symbolic language before actually arriving and starting their programs.

Social integration

The need for students to become actively involved with their social environments in order to overcome the feeling of isolation is critical. Considerable social involvement will take place at the initiative of the students themselves, but this can be augmented either by services specifically targeted to foreign students, or by services and activities generally available through graduate student societies or individual departments. Specific programs for foreign students should include individual host family or pairing schemes to match incoming foreign students with host students or families familiar with the academic life of the

institution. Such arrangements are not only helpful to foreign students on a personal basis, but important instruments for lowering the barriers to successful adjustment and learning.

Academic assistance

Once students have arrived and started their programs, academic assistance is normally provided by academic supervisors or by faculty in general. Support and help with academic matters is also provided informally by the students' peer group, especially other foreign students. Available academic assistance may not be sufficient, especially if the supervisor lacks familiarity with students' particular cultural backgrounds and languages. Therefore, it is advisable to make special arrangements, for example, by organizing seminars targeted to foreign students at the beginning of their studies to provide a general outline of the foundations of the field, and opportunity for faculty and students to engage in dialogue about the schools of thought, approaches, and academic traditions which prevail in both host and home countries.

Internationalizing the Curriculum and Learning

Since internationalizing higher education is a topic too large to be dealt with here in any comprehensive way, only a few remarks which are pertinent to the specific focus of this paper concerning learning styles and forms of student-instructor relationship are presented.

As there may be home culture sanctions against speaking out in a classroom setting, it is advisable initially to "encourage" rather than "press" verbal participation, allowing international students time to develop an understanding of contexts and to find a comfort level at which they might express themselves. Periodically placing all students in small discussion groups can provide a setting where international students are able to express themselves more readily, and check the reception of their ideas and expressive method with a few students, before venturing ideas before the larger group. Co-authorship with host peers of some course papers would enable international students to develop an understanding of the academic writing style which prevails in the host country. Instructors should also check curriculum materials and exam questions for metaphorical constructs and examples that depend upon host culture-specific contexts for their meanings. Instructor-student relationships, often taken for granted by host students and instructors alike, may not be self-evident to international students, and should be made explicit.

Pre-return Assistance

An idea that may assist foreign students (and, at times, their families) with re-integration, both prior to and after their return, is that of volunteer alumni mentors. Alumni mentor programs are currently established at such institutions as Concordia University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Manitoba, but their present scope does not always include international students (Vale, 1994). It would not be difficult to extend such programs to international students by recruiting alumni in the home country, who would connect with and advise international students while they are studying in Canada and for a period after their return to home countries.

More ambitious and costly are programs, presently in place in several European institutions (Schnitzer & Wagner, 1991), which enable graduate students to return to their home country approximately a year or two before their graduation to discuss future employment and re-integration. These programs are administered by host institutions in collaboration with the labour or scientific attachés at embassies in the host country, in order to provide students with realistic prospects, useful information, and contacts to facilitate the return. Such programs can also influence the focus and direction of the thesis or project work graduate students undertake as part of their studies.

CONCLUSIONS

The co-authors are fully aware that some of the problems addressed, especially the initial feelings of cultural loss and social isolation, are part of the learning experience itself, the process of adaptation required when living abroad, and the disruption of

familiar ways and patterns occurring when undertaking to spend some of one's formative years in a country other than one's own. The suggestions made are based on the conviction that many of the difficulties and frustrations that foreign students experience could be eliminated or mitigated. Although implementation of these suggestions would require some additional services and effort on the part of faculty and administration, these measures aimed at facilitating adaptation and academic success would not only benefit international students, but the host institutions as well.

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Editor:

Lesley Andres
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, British Columbia
V6T 1Z4
email: lesley.andres@ubc.ca

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